

## ***In Defense of the Essence/Energies Distinction: A Reply to Critics***

David Bradshaw

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It is a pleasure to respond to the essays collected in this volume. One of my goals in writing *Aristotle East and West* was to draw attention to the essence/energies distinction in a way that would invite engagement by contemporary philosophers and theologians. Despite their many disagreements, the authors represented here are at one in recognizing the importance of such engagement, and I am pleased to join them in carrying it forward. Since most of what I have to say here must necessarily be critical, it is important to begin by noting that we share some important common ground—namely, the goal of seeking to broaden the horizon of Christian philosophical theology beyond the traditional western canon to include the Byzantine tradition, and most notably the work of St. Gregory Palamas. Whatever our other disagreements, the collective engagement presented here surely advances that goal.

My response will begin with the essays with which I have only minor disagreements and proceed toward those with which my disagreements are more pervasive. Following this rule I shall set aside without further comment the essays by Professor Martzelos and Metropolitan Ammochostos, with both of which I find myself in full agreement. I am pleased to note their endorsement of the essence/energies distinction (interpreted, so far as I can tell, in a way much like my own), and I welcome them as allies in a common cause.

Professor Athanasopoulos is also plainly an ally, but one who offers some important critical questions regarding my exegesis of Palamas. They include: (1) whether I rely upon an unduly western reading of Aristotle, (2) whether it is correct to speak of the energies as “manifestations” of the divine essence, and (3) in what sense the energies are relational. About the first of these I have little to say, for the exegesis of Aristotle plays little role in my reading of Palamas or of the Greek Fathers generally. It is certainly true that I present Aristotle as the beginning of a long arc of theological reflection that makes use of the concept of *energeia*, but

the very length and complexity of that trajectory make it impossible to draw any simple connection between *energeia* in Aristotle and in the Greek Fathers. Athanasopoulos is therefore not quite right to find in the title of *Aristotle East and West* a concern with the ways “that both East and West have used Aristotle to justify their inherently different approaches to issues related to philosophy and theology.” The Byzantines did not use Aristotle to “justify” their theology in the same way as did the Latin scholastics. Their debt to Aristotle was limited to the use of concepts that were ultimately Aristotelian in origin—a significant connection, to be sure, but one quite different from that of the West. Thus, although I have no quarrel with Athanasopoulos’s suggestion that the Byzantines arrived at original and insightful readings of Aristotle, I do not see it as particularly germane to the issues discussed in my book.

The other two questions are more directly relevant. That the divine energies are manifestations of the divine essence is clear from the entire history of the concept, including particularly its association with the divine glory. Palamas speaks of them this way freely; for example, he describes the energies as characteristic (*charaktēristikai*) and indicative (*deiktikai*) of the *ousia*, and he quotes with approval St. John Damascene’s definition of *energeia* as “the physical power and movement that manifests (*dēlōtikē*) each *ousia*.”<sup>1</sup> So the essence and energies are not “distinct and unrelated,” as Athanasopoulos suggests. Yet this does not imply that all the energies are necessary, precisely because the essence they manifest is that of a free personal being. I therefore do not think that such a view is in danger of collapsing into the Origenist idea that God necessarily creates, nor do I think that seeing the action of the divine Persons as dependent upon their essence in any way restricts divine freedom. It is hard to see, after all, what role the essence could play if it does not ground and enable divine action.

That the energies are relational is an idea I draw from *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, where Palamas writes:

Nor indeed does everything predicated of him [God] denote the substance, for relation is predicated of him, which is relative and refers to relationships with another but is not indicative of substance. Such also is the divine energy in God, for it is neither substance nor accident, even though it is called quasi-accident by some theologians who are indicating solely that it is in God but is not the substance.<sup>2</sup>

Palamas does not explain in precisely what way the divine energies are relational, nor does he address the question (rightly pressed by Athanasopoulos) of what the relation in question could have been prior to creation. This question is in fact already suggested by the very concept of the uncreated light, for surely it makes no sense to speak of a light that is seen by no one and reveals nothing. The answer surely must lie within God's Trinitarian nature.<sup>3</sup> I do not see anything intrinsically problematic about this answer, save that it is unsatisfying and one would like to know more. However, if our goal is to understand the nature of God's life prior to creation, it is not surprising that we should find ourselves frustrated.

Fr. Nicholas Loudovikos also objects to my attempt to understand the uncreated light in terms of the mutual glorification of the Persons of the Trinity, although on different grounds. His first objection is that one cannot intelligibly speak of what God was like "before" creation, since time itself began with creation. Yet Scripture speaks this way freely (e.g., John 17:5, I Cor. 2:7, Eph. 1:4), and it has been followed in this regard by the Fathers—as, for example, in the Nicene Creed, which speaks of the Son as "begotten before all ages." Such statements remind us that the time which began with creation is merely *our* time, and its absence in no way excludes a higher, atemporal mode of being.<sup>4</sup> Fr. Loudovikos's second objection is that "the hypostatic idioms are absolutely enough if we are to describe the Trinitarian relations." This is correct as far as it goes, but it overlooks that the hypostatic idioms as defined by the Cappadocians *include* the mutual glorification and revelation of the Persons, and, in particular, that the Spirit "manifests the energy" of the Son.<sup>5</sup> This statement of St. Gregory of Nyssa is as much a part of the Cappadocians' Trinitarian doctrine as any other, and was plainly recognized as authoritative by St. John Damascene, who incorporated it within his own teaching.

Much else in Fr. Loudovikos's essay, such as his emphasis on the dialogical character of the divine energy, I find salutary and important.<sup>6</sup> However, I must express caution regarding his statement that the distinction between essence and energy is *kat' epinoian*. Everything depends on how this phrase is understood. That it is ambiguous was recognized already by St. John Damascene, whose words on this subject in his *Dialectica* are worth quoting:

Correct speech exhibits two kinds of excogitation (*epinoia*). Thus there is that which is, as it were, a certain extra thinking out and consideration by which the general concept and unanalyzed knowledge of things are unfolded and made clear. Such is the case when

that which to the senses appears simple is by careful investigation discovered to be manifold and varied. Man, for example, appears to be simple, but by excogitation he is discovered to be twofold—made up of a body and a soul. The other kind is that which, through a combination of the sensitive and imaginative faculties, from things which exist makes up and imagines things which do not and produces a figment of thought. Such is the concoction of fabulous centaurs, sirens, and tragelaphs.<sup>7</sup>

The first type of *epinoia* is the act of *discovering* in the object of thought a reality or distinction that is truly there, although thought is needed to identify and clarify it—for example, the distinction of body and soul; the second is the act of *inventing* something that has no reality apart from its being thought. Palamas himself, no doubt aware of this ambiguity, seems to have deliberately avoided saying that the distinction of essence and energies is *kat' epinoian*. Nonetheless later Palamites (beginning, as Fr. Levy points out in his essay, with Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos) adopted such language freely.<sup>8</sup> Precisely what each meant by this must be determined from his own writings, but in general the early Palamites, at least, seem to have adhered quite closely to Palamas's actual meaning, if not to his words. As regards the phrase *kat' epinoian*, this is shown particularly by their holding that the distinction between the Father and the Son is also *kat' epinoian*, a statement plainly not intended to undermine its reality or to suggest that it is merely imposed by human thought.<sup>9</sup>

So much for terminology. In light of the importance of this subject it will also be worthwhile to review briefly the grounds on which Palamas holds that the distinction is present within God, as it were, independently of human thought. His reasoning is perhaps clearest in relation to the *logoi* or exemplars of beings spoken of by Dionysius the Areopagite, and understood by Palamas as a form of the divine energy. After quoting Dionysius's description of the *logoi* as “predeterminations and divinely good volitions which are responsible for the determination and creation of beings,” Palamas adds: “How then can the predeterminations and divine volitions responsible for the creation of beings be created?”<sup>10</sup> The answer is of course that they cannot, because they are precisely that by which creation takes place. Yet they are not (even collectively) equivalent to the divine essence, for then we would be back to the necessitarianism of Origen. Thus the very act of creation presupposes a distinction between the divine *logoi* (energies) and the divine essence, as well as among the *logoi* (energies) themselves.

Nor are the *logoi* the only energies existing prior to creation. Palamas takes the passage of St. Maximus's *Chapters on Theology and Economy* regarding the works of God that "did not begin in time" as a description of the energies present to God before creation, distinct both from the divine essence and from one another:

Some works of God are without beginning, as the Fathers also rightly affirm. For was it not needful for the work of providence to exist before Creation, so as to cause each of the created things to come to be in time, out of nonbeing? Was it not necessary for a divine knowledge to know before choosing, even outside time? . . . How could one conceive of a beginning of God's self-contemplation, and was there ever a moment when God began to be moved toward contemplation of Himself? Never!

There is, therefore, a single unoriginate providence, that of God, and it is a work of God. . . . Nonetheless, providence is not the divine essence, and thus the essence of God is not alone unoriginate.<sup>11</sup>

He goes on to quote the passage of Maximus, drawing from it the conclusion that not only providence, foreknowledge, and self-contemplation, but also goodness, holiness, virtue, and immortality are divine energies which (in the words of Maximus) God "infinitely transcends" as cause.<sup>12</sup>

So the distinction between essence and energies, and indeed that among different energies, exists prior to creation. Even so, one might still argue that these distinctions are imposed by human thought in the sense that, although *we* must necessarily conceive of God as possessing different energies, they are not separate, countable realities within God himself. In a sense this is true; Palamas is quite happy to concede—indeed, he insists—that the energies are not self-subsistent and exist only as manifestations of the essence. If that is what one means by 'separate,' then they are not separate either from the essence or from one another. However, they *are* separate in another and equally important sense, that of possessing different modal and temporal properties. Given that God might not have created, or might have created a world very different from the one that He did, His providence and foreknowledge might have been very different from what they in fact are. Yet His goodness, holiness, virtue, and immortality would have been no different (or, at least, would not have varied in the same way), meaning that the

modal properties of some energies differ from those of others. Likewise, as Palamas frequently points out, foreknowledge will have an end, and the energy of creation has both a beginning and an end, whereas other energies are fully eternal. So the energies differ from one another in their modal and temporal properties, and all of them collectively differ from the divine essence as manifestations differ from their cause. All of this is surely sufficient to show that the distinction among them, as well as between them collectively and the divine essence, is one that we discover and do not make.

Another contributor who accepts the essence/energies distinction, but who resists my interpretation precisely at this point, is Basil Trakakis. I appreciate Professor Trakakis's attempt to bring analytic concepts and methods to bear on this issue, and much that he says I can readily endorse. Our disagreement begins with his suggestion that the energies "represent ways of perceiving and conceiving God," that is, they are "modes of presentation that reflect . . . a way of perceiving God." There seems to be some confusion here, for a "mode of presentation" is what Trakakis (following Frege) has earlier characterized as a "sense," and he surely does not mean that the divine energies simply *are* senses. Rather, I take it that his view is that the expressions 'the divine essence' and 'the divine energies' are the same in reference but different in sense, and that the same is true of various expressions for particular divine energies such as 'goodness,' 'wisdom,' and the like. The energies, then, are not modes of presentation, but God conceived under various such modes, and the same is true of the divine essence.

If this interpretation is correct, then one obvious objection is that such a view fails to account for (a) the causal priority Palamas attributes to the essence, and (b) the radical unknowability and imparticipability of the essence as compared to the energies. After all, the morning star does not cause the evening star, nor is it the case that the evening star is knowable whereas the morning star is not; they are simply the same object conceived under different, roughly parallel descriptions. The same is true of water and H<sub>2</sub>O, Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain, Cicero and Tully, and other stock Fregean examples. In fact, the difference between the distinction wishes to draw and that of Palamas is so great that it would appear that Trakakis has not so much interpreted the essence/energies distinction as replaced it with one of his own. This Trakakian distinction is less controversial than that of Palamas, but also less interesting, for surely it has never been in doubt that God appears under various descriptions and can be named in different ways.

Trakakis also offers some criticisms of my own view. He alludes to my argument (repeated above) that “Palamas attributes to the energies properties that could not be ascribed to the essence,” dismissing it on the grounds that it does not show that the essence and energies are different “in an ontological sense.” If by this he means that they are not different self-subsistent entities, then I agree; but, as I have explained at length (including in passages quoted by Trakakis), Palamas’s view is that the energies are different *acts* performed by the one essence, that is, by God as He is known to himself, as distinct from how He is manifested. It seems to me that to establish such a difference the argument from properties is perfectly sufficient—and indeed that Trakakis ought to recognize this, since he himself notes the strength of arguments based on Leibniz’s Law. Trakakis also suggests briefly a couple of possible explanations for the energies, such as God’s creative act, that come to be and pass away. One is that they might be mere relational properties. This is surely a non-starter, for a relational property depends on the prior existence of its relata, whereas God’s creative act is precisely what brings creatures into existence. The other is that it is not the energies that come to be, but their use or effects. But Palamas is insistent that it is the acts themselves—creation, providence, foreknowledge—that come to be or pass away (or both), not merely their effects.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, Trakakis objects strongly to my comment—or rather, invitation—in the concluding paragraph of *Aristotle East and West*, “Let us now ask whether the God who has been the subject of so much strife and contention throughout western history was ever anything more than an idol.” He does not mention that this invitation comes after a careful analysis of the philosophical theologies of Augustine and Aquinas, as well as a shorter (but, I trust, sufficient) description of the collapse of western theism in the Enlightenment. That description was meant to remind readers that we live in the wake, not only of Augustine and Aquinas, but of Spinoza, Hume, Voltaire, Diderot, Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Mill, Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud, as well as their countless epigones. In light of that history the question from a cultural and historical standpoint is not whether western theism is tenable, but *why it was found to be untenable*, and whether it can be rehabilitated in such a way as to reinvigorate it after its seeming demise. It seems to me that, to address this question, one has to be prepared to think in radical terms. The suggestion that the God of western theism has been an “idol” is hardly original to me, but echoes a recurrent concern in contemporary philosophy and theology over under what conditions belief in God can avoid becoming idolatrous, inasmuch as it is always mediated by

human concepts. More specifically, I had in mind the warning of St. Gregory of Nyssa that to believe that God is an intelligible object (as has been a cardinal tenet of western theism since Augustine) is idolatrous.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps I should have made this allusion more explicit, although I would think that a careful reader of the book could hardly miss that this was one of my central concerns. At any rate, the substance of my view has not changed, and I will have to leave the reader to judge whether it is “uncritical” or “positivistic.”

Roy Clouser also accepts the essence/energies distinction, but, far from seeing me as too radical, complains that I am not radical enough. As he sees it, a proper understanding of the distinction should lead one to conclude that there is *no* determinate content to the divine nature other than that chosen by God. Speaking of my view that the energies manifest the essence, he writes:

He [Bradshaw] must instead be seeking a manifestation that is *like* the very essence of God. But if that essence is the creator of, and thus transcends, every kind of properties and laws that are found in creation and attributed to God—if the being of God is, as Basil puts it, “entirely free of quality”—then there are no properties that could comprise a nature for God’s essence. There is therefore nothing for a manifestation to be “like”—nothing it could share properties with . . . For us, freedom means what is possible under the laws that govern us. But the freedom of God’s essential being is precisely that he created all laws and is subject to none. For that reason there are no distinctions to be drawn among God’s energies as to which are necessary and which he is free to choose.

There are here, I think, a couple of confusions. One lies in assuming that there must be a qualitative resemblance between a manifestation and its source. This is far from the case. There is no non-trivial resemblance between lung disease and the shortened breath that manifests it, nor between a man’s love for his wife and the flowers he brings home, nor between the mind of Mark Twain and *Huckleberry Finn*. The relationship between a source and its manifestation is far too varied to be captured simply in terms of resemblance, and this is especially true when the source is a free agent capable of sustained, creative action.<sup>15</sup>

However, this is a relatively minor issue, for Clouser could have made his case without any particular assumption about likeness. His central claim is that all of the divine attributes or



energies are chosen by God, and that apart from these God cannot be said to have a nature at all. Whatever else one might say of this view, it is not (as Clouser seems to believe) that of the Greek Fathers. The classic treatment of this issue was provided by St. Athanasius in his *Oration against the Arians*. Confronting the challenge posed by the Arians that the Son must be begotten either by will or by necessity, Athanasius replies that there is a third possibility, namely that He is begotten by nature. He regards the supposition that God does not possess goodness and mercy by nature as so plainly impious that it can serve as part of a *reductio* of the Arian position:

For let them tell us themselves—that God is good and merciful, does this attach to Him by will or not? If by will, we must consider that He began to be good, and that His not being good is possible; for to counsel and choose implies an inclination two ways, and is incidental to a rational nature. But if it is too unseemly that He should be called good and merciful by will, then what they have said themselves must be retorted on them —“therefore by necessity and not at His pleasure He is good,” and “who is it that imposes this necessity on Him?” But if it is unseemly to speak of necessity in the case of God, and therefore it is by nature that He is good, much more is He, and more truly, Father of the Son by nature and not by will.<sup>16</sup>

Athanasius’s view on this point was followed by the mainstream of the Greek patristic tradition, including the Cappadocians. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, freely adopts the Platonic identification of God as the Good, arguing on this basis that “it is not possible with God that there not be a good act of will,” nor that “the good fail to be the object of the Father’s will.”<sup>17</sup> Yet he adds in the same passage that God is also *beyond* all good, thereby indicating (as must be true in any case, given Gregory’s understanding of the divine names) that to call God the Good is to name, not the divine essence, but one of the divine energies. Plainly, however, since God necessarily wills the good, this energy exists not “by will” but “by nature.”<sup>18</sup>

Of course this is so far simply an appeal to authority, and one might still hold that Athanasius and those who followed him were mistaken. However, the conviction that God is intrinsically and by nature good is so deeply embedded in Christian thought, for both philosophical and Scriptural reasons, that to dislodge it would take a powerful argument indeed.<sup>19</sup> I do not find that the argument offered by Professor Clouser rises to that bar. The troubles begin

in the second paragraph, where he defines the second sense of ‘created’ as “X is the creation of [i.e., is created by] some cause when it is ontologically distinct from that cause,” offering as an example that a riot is “created” in this sense by the person who instigates it. Unfortunately what it means for two things to be “ontologically distinct” is notoriously obscure, and Clouser does not elucidate this key concept. Philosophers have long debated, for example, whether a statue is ontologically distinct from the metal that constitutes it, or a set from its members, or a musical composition from its notes. Without a careful discussion of such issues I simply do not know what to make of the claim that one thing is “created” by another in the relevant sense. Nor do the problems end there. Clouser later (in section III.C) confronts what must surely be an obvious objection, namely that to assert that God chooses presupposes that He has at least one capacity intrinsic to His nature, the capacity for choice. Clouser’s reply is simply that “there are no possibilities, potentialities, dispositions, kinds, natures, etc., aside from God’s having brought them about.” This is an assertion rather than an argument. The objection Clouser must confront is that, if God makes choices, He must *by definition* possess the capacity for choosing, since a capacity for x is nothing other than the ability to do x, and one who does something *ipso facto* has the ability to do it. Nothing that Clouser says actually confronts this objection.

I turn next to the essay by John Milbank. Professor Milbank is the only contributor to reject altogether the essence/energies distinction, as well as to deny that there is, after all, much real continuity between Palamas and the earlier Greek tradition. It is hard to know quite how to respond to his essay, since it combines sweeping historical claims with only rather casual supporting analysis. In some cases I agree with the narrative, in other I do not, and in others I do not know what to make of it; yet in all cases I fear that the narrative has a certain priority over the supposed evidence for it, so that the texts are made to say what the narrative requires rather than themselves determining its content. I shall give some examples of this below. First, however, it will be worthwhile to ask about the overarching structure within which Milbank frames his narrative, since it is this framework that determines most of the particular judgments that follow.

The framework consists in a distinction between two accounts of participation. In one, the non-participable is “a literally ‘separated’ ontological realm that in no respect shares itself,” while in the other “it is the imparticipable One that is itself after all participated.” Milbank identifies the first view as that of Plotinus, for whom “everything else somehow derives from the

One, yet the One gives nothing *of* itself.” The second view is that of Proclus, for whom the One “gives itself absolutely and without stint, yet because it really does give, it is not identical with its diversity of gifts which can only be gifts because they remain less than the giver.” Milbank, quite naturally, prefers the second account to the first, and in his subsequent account of Christian thought he sees good Christian thinkers (Augustine, Aquinas, and most of the Greek Fathers) as adhering to it, whereas those who are bad (Scotus, Palamas) adhere to the first.

The trouble with this scheme is that it requires one to ignore the real complexity of actual historical thinkers in order to pigeonhole them into one of these two slots. One can already see this occurring in Milbank’s description of the pagan Neoplatonists. One would never guess from his account that for Plotinus the One is also the Good, and it produces all things precisely *because* it is the Good. Yet this is axiomatic for Plotinus, as is clear from his earliest discussion of emanation:

Now when anything else comes to perfection we see that it produces, and does not endure to remain by itself, but makes something else . . . as fire warms, snow cools, and drugs act on something else in a way corresponding to their own nature—all imitating the First Principle as far as they are able by tending to everlastingness and generosity. How then could the most perfect, the first Good, remain in itself as if it grudged to give of itself or was impotent, when it is the productive power of all things?<sup>20</sup>

How Milbank can draw from this the conclusion that the One “gives nothing of itself” is beyond me. The reason cannot lie in the fact that the One does not consciously *intend* to produce and is not aware of doing so, for the same is true of the One in Proclus. Apparently the great difference is supposed to be that for Plotinus nothing immediately participates in the One, whereas for Proclus all things do so. But this is merely because Plotinus prefers to describe the presence of the One to all things in terms other than participation, using, as is his wont, language far more vivid and dynamic than the static and quasi-mathematical language of Proclus. So for Plotinus the One is that “from which all depend and to which all look and are and live and think”; it is “the source of being and the why of being”; it (or rather, he) is “the cause of the being [of all things] and they, we may say, strive after him.”<sup>21</sup> For Plotinus, just as much as for Proclus—

indeed, it seems to me, rather so—the One is at the heart of all things, making them what they are. This is “participation,” if not in name, yet in fact.<sup>22</sup>

Milbank’s account of the Greek Fathers is unfortunately marred by the same tendency to recast historical figures so as to make them fit a preconceived narrative. Thus one finds, still early in the essay, the surprising assertion:

The Fathers normally spoke of *ousia* in the singular, but of *energeiai* in the plural. This implies that, since God is simple, when his energy is single it is entirely at one with uncreated *ousia*. However, when the energies are plural, then they are created energies—and this is the way that the Cappadocians generally spoke of them.

The *a priori* reasoning here is evident in the assumption that, because God is simple, *energeia* in the singular must refer to the divine essence, whereas in the plural it must refer to created effects. In other words, one assumes that the Cappadocians held something like the Thomistic view of divine simplicity, and then reads their usage of *energeia* to make it fit this scheme. We shall look at the slender evidence Milbank produces for this reading in a moment, but first let us notice what violence it would do to the continuity between the Cappadocians and earlier Christian thought. St. Paul’s usage clearly does not fit such a pattern, for when he refers to the *energeia* by which God is able to subdue all things to Himself (Phil. 3:21), or that by which He raised Christ from the dead (Eph. 1:19), or that which is being made effective (*energoumenēn*) within Paul himself (Col. 1:29), it would strain all credulity to think that he has in mind the divine essence. Nor can we find such a pattern in the Ante-Nicene period when, for example, the *Apostolic Constitutions* refer to the apostles as being filled with the *energeia* of the Holy Spirit, or when Origen attributes miracles performed in the Church to the divine *energeia*.<sup>23</sup> Here too *energeia*, whatever else it may be, is not the divine essence.

Still, it is just possible that the Cappadocians, being more philosophical than earlier authors, decided to reform existing usage in the way Milbank suggests. What evidence does he offer for this conclusion? Initially there is none, but eventually (in Section 6) one finds the following:

To create beings is therefore also to pluralise energy, which is otherwise ‘singular’ (that is to say absolutely unified, not, of course, ‘individual’). It might seem, as Bradshaw implies, that this is belied by Gregory of Nyssa’s speaking of the divine *energeiai* of wisdom, goodness, and providence as ‘things around the divine nature’, a concept echoed by Gregory Nazianzus [sic]. However, what we have here are *plural* energies seen as ‘tokens’ ‘reflections’ and ‘traces’ ‘left behind by God’ which are therefore things that proceed *from* God. As Basil puts it in another passage cited by Bradshaw: ‘his *energeiai* come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach’ (*Epistle* 234.1). Nothing in these passages suggests that the energies in the plural are not *created* realities.

And that is it. Incredibly, Milbank does not seem to realize that the burden of proof is upon him to establish his claim against the strong *prima facie* presumption that *energeia*, like virtually all other terms, has the same meaning in the singular and the plural. Nor does he make any attempt to come to grips with the entire chapter I devote to explicating its meaning in the Cappadocians. Plainly the real work is supposed to be done by the philosophical argument, i.e., that because God is simple, His energy can only pluralized by creation. I have dealt with this argument above in discussing the paper by Fr. Loudovikos. Here I merely wish to observe that it is philosophical preconceptions, rather than textual evidence, that govern Milbank’s historical narrative.

It would be tedious to review all the other instances of similarly egregious misreadings in Milbank’s essay. But perhaps a few more examples will not be out of place. I know of no competent scholar who believes that the *logoi* of St. Maximus are created, much less that they exist in a “sort of limbo between uncreated and created.” They are rather uncreated *tout court*, as they *must* be if they are the acts of will by which creation takes place.<sup>24</sup> Dionysius nowhere distinguishes two different meanings of the terms for the divine processions, one in which they refer to the divine essence and another in which they refer to created perfections.<sup>25</sup> Palamas does not say in *Theophanies* 12 that the distinction between the essence and the energies is “of the same kind” as that between the essence and the persons, and indeed his repeated denial that the energies are hypostatic clearly excludes this.<sup>26</sup> Even less does he posit the divine essence as a “perfectly simple, indivisible, imparticipable interiority,” as if the role of the energies were to prevent access to the essence rather than precisely to *manifest* it. And so on. I regret that there is

so little in Milbank's essay with which one can constructively engage, but that is the result when an author approaches history, as he does, in subservience to a preconceived idea.

I turn finally to the essay by Fr. Antoine Levy. This essay requires me first to clear away an apparent misunderstanding. Fr. Levy seems to assume that I write as an apologist for Eastern Orthodoxy. I do not. I am a philosopher, not a theologian, and my interest lies in how western philosophy and Christian theology have interacted with one another, as well as how this interaction has shaped subsequent western thought. From this point of view it is perfectly appropriate to ask whether a distinctive approach to the Athens-Jerusalem problem (as I describe it in the Preface to *Aristotle East and West*) existed in Byzantium, and, if so, what were its *philosophical* advantages and disadvantages as compared to those more familiar in the West. This question is quite different from that of the legitimacy of Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism as ecclesiastical bodies. The latter question ought to be decided on the obvious grounds—such as, for example, the truth of the Roman understanding of papal primacy—about which I am not qualified to comment. That is one reason why in *Aristotle East and West* I tried to avoid even mentioning Orthodoxy or Catholicism, speaking instead of the Greek East and the Latin West, and I emphasized that the philosophical divergences at issue arose long before, and quite independently of, any ecclesiastical breach. They would have existed even if there had been no quarrel over the *filioque*, papal primacy, and other such matters, and are of interest quite apart from their eventual ecclesiastical entanglements.<sup>27</sup>

Fr. Levy also seems to misunderstand the role that I attribute to Aristotle's theology. As I explained above in connection with the paper by Professor Athanasopoulos, I do not see the East as more truly Aristotelian than the West, and I certainly do not think that it did a better job of appropriating Aristotle's theology, for this was hardly its concern. Nor do I think that "Augustine's identification between essence and operation leads to a static conception of God" in contrast to that of Aristotle's theology. It is quite obvious that Augustine's theology is less static than that of Aristotle, who, after all, does not think that God acts in history, much less that He has become incarnate. What I actually said was that Augustine's *conception of being* is static, in that "for Augustine *esse* is not an act, but a condition—that of full and unqualified wholeness."<sup>28</sup> This is merely a more nuanced version of an observation that is a commonplace of Augustine scholarship, namely, that Augustine virtually identifies being with immutability.<sup>29</sup> The importance of Augustine's conception of being for his theology is a more complex matter.

Here I can only refer the reader to what I have written about the matter elsewhere, where I have traced the conceptual links leading from Augustine's conception of being to his understanding of divine simplicity, and thence to his interpretation of the Biblical theophanies—topics on which Fr. Levy, as much as he seems to dislike my reading of Augustine, does not comment.<sup>30</sup>

I also believe that Fr. Levy exhibits some confusion regarding divine freedom. First, it is important to note that I am hardly the first commentator to see an incompatibility between Aquinas's identification of the divine will and divine essence and his assertion that God exercises free choice (*liberum arbitrium*). The problem is obvious enough that it was raised during Aquinas's own lifetime, with (I have argued) rather unsatisfactory answers; nor has there been any agreed upon solution since.<sup>31</sup> So even if it can ultimately be resolved, to say that raising it is an instance of "conceptual sleight of hand" seems rather odd. What is Fr. Levy's own solution? Here is what I take to be the key passage:

That the result (*apotelesma*) of God's creative energies is a contingent event or something that might not have existed, does not entail that the energies out of which the world has arisen are more contingent than the energies which emanate naturally from God's essence, like Goodness or Beauty. The opposite case would lead to an infinite regression: God would have wanted these contingent energies to exist, so that He would have wanted His will to produce these energies, and so on. In other words, God might have willed something else than to create the world, but the positive will to create the world rather than not to create it must flow naturally and from all eternity from His essence.

I find this passage confusing, for on the one hand it seems argue that God's creative energies are not contingent, but on the other it goes on to say that "God might have willed something else than to create the world." To possibly be otherwise is the very definition of 'contingent,' so if God could have willed other than to create, His creative will is *by definition* contingent, and so also is His creative energy. Nor does the infinite regress argument at all clarify matters, for if it proves anything, it proves too much—namely that *any* exercise of will is impossible because it requires an infinite regress. (One can see this by replacing the reference to God with one to, say, Peter, or that to energies by one to a creature; either way, the argument remains the same in form

and its validity is unaffected.) The fact that in order to will x, one must will to will x, and will to will to will x, and so on, is no more an argument against the will than the fact that in order for p to be true, it must be true that p is true, and true that it is true that p is true, and so on, is an argument against truth. Both regresses are innocuous. But with this argument out of the way, surely the fact that a given energy issues in something contingent *does* make it contingent—for an energy is, after all, a kind of action, and an action and its effect share the same modality. This is not to deny that God’s creative will flows “naturally and from all eternity from His essence,” but an act can be natural and still be contingent, as are most of our own voluntary acts.<sup>32</sup>

The nub of Fr. Levi’s article is, of course, his attempt to show that the East and West do not truly differ in their understanding of *energeia* and related concepts, such as synergy. I have no particular quarrel with his explication of the role of Porphyry in forming the western tradition (although I suspect it is exaggerated). His attempt to show that the East holds the same view is, however, arbitrary and unsupported. He writes:

In actual fact, participation in the divine energies, whether supernatural or natural, is the *result* (*apotelesma*) of those divine energies. *Energeia* IS causal efficiency, the effect of which is *pathos*, understood as a the reception of a perfective—and not a destructive or damaging—motion . . . [According to Palamas] an uncreated *energeia* induces a created, divinizing *pathos* in the intellect of the creature, which in turn becomes able to contemplate the divine light.

It is rather incongruous to find the emphatic assertion, “*energeia* IS causal efficacy,” offered with no support as if it were simply self-evident. Anyone who has read my book (or the essay at the outset of this volume) will know that *energeia* changed in meaning throughout its long history, so that no single rendering simply IS the meaning of the word, and furthermore in none of its standard renderings did it ever mean “causal efficiency.” But let us lay this issue aside, for its role in Fr. Levi’s argument is in any case unclear. The central point of the passage lies in the assertion that the uncreated *energeia* is in every case accompanied by a created *pathos* which constitutes its reception, and it is this created *pathos* that is divinizing. The *pathos* is (as the following paragraphs make clear) the Palamite equivalent to Aquinas’s created grace.

Unfortunately Fr. Levi cites virtually no texts to support these sweeping assertions, and for my



part, I know of no place where Palamas or any other of the Greek Fathers holds that divinization is the result of a created *pathos*.<sup>33</sup> It seems to me, then, that it is Fr. Levy who here gives evidence of an “ingenious imagination” that far outruns the actual evidence.

Let me again state my regret that in this brief space it has been necessary to be mainly critical. All of the contributors advance the discussion in important ways, and many also offer generous comments about my own work for which I am sincerely grateful. I hope that this collection will prompt further work on the important issues they have raised.



<sup>1</sup> Gregory Palamas, *On the Divine Energies*, chap. 23-24, ed. P. Chrestou, *Syngrammata* (Thessalonica, 1962-1992), vol. 2, 113-14, citing John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* II.23. See also the similar definition attributed to Gregory of Nyssa in *Triads* III.2.7.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, chap. 127; tr. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Toronto, 1988), 231. Note that ‘substance’ here is *ousia*. See also chap. 134: “God is a transcendent substance in which there are observed only relation and creation” (Sinkewicz, 239).

<sup>3</sup> See further *Aristotle East and West*, 214-20, 271-73.

<sup>4</sup> See particularly Basil the Great, *Hexaemeron* I.5, which describes the state “beyond time” of the angels before the creation of the sensible world. I have discussed this and related texts in “Time and Eternity in the Greek Fathers,” *The Thomist* 70 (2006), 311-66.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 2; cf. *Aristotle East and West* 215-17.

<sup>6</sup> I do not agree with his sanguine reading of Aquinas, for a “happy contradiction” is still a contradiction. But I will not dwell on that point here.

<sup>7</sup> John of Damascus, *Dialectica*, chap. 65; tr. Frederic H. Chase, Jr., *Saint John of Damascus: Writings* (Washington, D.C., 1958), 101.

<sup>8</sup> See the extensive discussion in John A. Demetracopoulos, “Palamas Transformed: Palamite Interpretations of the Distinction between God’s ‘Essence’ and ‘Energies’ in Late Byzantium” in *Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204-1500*, ed. Martin Hinterberger and Chris Schabel (Leuven, 2011), 263-372. (I should note, however, that I do not agree with all details of this essay’s interpretation of Palamas.)

<sup>9</sup> See Demetracopoulos, “Palamas Transformed,” 283-85, especially fn. 58 and 60. In fact it would appear from the Damascene’s example of body and soul that the phrase *kat’ epinoian* can admit of a distinction *stronger* than that intended by Palamas—for the body and soul can exist independently of one another, as they do after death, something that Palamas would never allow of the essence and energies. The Damascene’s use of this example was probably inspired by *Ambigua* 7 of St. Maximus the Confessor, which says that the body and soul are distinguished only by *epinoia* although it goes on to recognize that they can exist separately (PG 91 1100C-1101B).

<sup>10</sup> Palamas, *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, chap. 87, citing Dionysius, *Divine Names* 5.8; tr. Sinkewicz, 185-87.

<sup>11</sup> Palamas, *Triads* III.2.6; tr. Nicholas Gendle, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads* (New York, 1983), 94.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, III.2.7; cf. Maximus, *Chapters on Theology and Economy* I.48-50.

<sup>13</sup> One point made in this long footnote (n. 31) is correct, however, namely that chapter 87 of Palamas’s *Dialogue* does not support my claim that the essence/energies distinction is mind-independent. I am not now sure why I cited that passage, but it was clearly an error.

<sup>14</sup> “He who thinks God is something to be known (*tōn ginōskomenōn ti*) does not have life, because he has turned from true Being to what he considers by sense perception to have being.” Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* II.234, tr. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York, 1978), 115; cited in *Aristotle East and West*, 191 n. 15.

<sup>15</sup> I would for similar reasons reject Clouser’s understanding of the relationship between Forms and their participants as one of qualitative resemblance, although that is not to the point here.

<sup>16</sup> Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians* III.62 (PG 26 453C; NPNF vol. 4, 428).

<sup>17</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* III.6.18 (GNO vol. 2, 192; NPNF vol. 5, 202).

<sup>18</sup> See further the classic article by Fr. Georges Florovsky, “St. Athanasius’ Concept of Creation,” *Studia Patristica* 6 (1962), 36-57, reprinted in his *Aspects of Church History* (Belmont, Mass., 1975), 39-62, as well as my own “Divine Freedom in the Greek Patristic Tradition,” *Quaestiones Disputatae* 2 (2011), 56-69.

<sup>19</sup> One thinks, for example, of the repeated statement in Genesis, “and God saw that it was good.” Why would He care whether what He had made was good if He was not already himself good, prior to the creative act?

<sup>20</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* V.4.1.26-36, tr. A.H. Armstrong in the Loeb edition.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, I.6.7.10-12, VI.8.14.31-32, VI.7.42.12-13; cf. *Aristotle East and West*, 93-94, where these texts are cited and discussed.

<sup>22</sup> Space does not permit me to discuss another aspect of the One's self-giving, its availability to the soul in mystical union, but see *Enneads* V.5.8, VI.7.34-36, and VI.9.3-4 for some representative discussions.

<sup>23</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* V.20.49; Origen, *Contra Celsum* II.51, III.14, 46, VII.35; cf. further references in *Aristotle East and West*, 123-27.

<sup>24</sup> See *Aristotle East and West*, 204-07, or in greater detail my "The Logoi of Beings in Greek Patristic Thought" in *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation*, ed. Bruce Foltz and John Chryssavgis (Fordham University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> Milbank cites at this point *Divine Names* XI.6, but unfortunately he uses the notoriously unreliable translation of Colm Luibheid in the Classics of Western Spirituality edition. Luibheid does indeed make it seem that Dionysius is distinguishing two meanings of the same terms: "'Being itself,' 'life itself,' 'divinity itself,' are names signifying divinity, source, and cause, and these are applied to the one transcendent cause and source beyond source of all things. But we use the same terms in a derivative fashion and we apply them to the provident acts of power which come forth from that God in whom nothing at all participates" (953C-956A). Even in Luibheid's translation, there is nothing to indicate that the "provident acts of power" are created perfections. However, the translation itself is misleading, for the term rendered "in a derivative fashion" is *methektōs*, "by participation." The entire construction is a *men . . . de* clause contrasting two ways in which the *same* terms are used, the one "originatively and divinely and causally," the other "by participation." It is not a case of the same terms being used to refer to two different things, but of their being used to refer to the same things in two different modes, the one (in God) originatively and the other (in creatures) by participation.

<sup>26</sup> The passage in question is quite brief, and merely reads: "Theotimos: Do you say that the energy is other than the essence as differing from it, yet inseparable from it? Theophanes: As hypostasis also differs from essence; for each differs from it [i.e., the essence] in the way signified by the name" (*Syngrammata*, vol. 2, 235). It baffles me how anyone could draw from this the idea that Palamas reifies the energies as hypostases distinct from the essence, particularly when he repeatedly denies any such suggestion (e.g., *Triads* II.3.6, III.1.9, 18, *On the Divine Energies* 10).

<sup>27</sup> As a more personal note, I would add that I do not in fact think that any currently existing ecclesiastical body is legitimate in the most important sense, that is, in the sense of fulfilling Christ's intent. Nothing could be clearer from the New Testament than that Christ founded only a single church that is to have no geographic or cultural boundaries. History has placed us in the position of having to negotiate our way in light of the ecclesiastical wreckage of the Middle Ages, but we ought not to confuse that which is best, in our current circumstances, with that which is truly and properly good.

<sup>28</sup> *Aristotle East and West*, 224.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (London, 1961), 21-22; James F. Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being: A Metaphysical Essay* (The Hague, 1965), 12-18.

<sup>30</sup> Besides *Aristotle East and West*, 222-29, see also my "Augustine the Metaphysician" in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and George E. Demacopoulos (Crestwood, NY, 2008), 227-51 (differing from the former primarily in more detail drawn from Augustine's early works). On the theophanies see also Bogdan G. Bucur, "Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008), 67-93.

<sup>31</sup> Besides *Aristotle East and West*, 247-50, 259-62, and the articles cited there, other helpful discussions include Reginald A. Redlon, "St. Thomas and the Freedom of the Creative Act," *Franciscan Studies* 20 (1960), 1-18 (especially good on the scholastic manuals); Katherin Rogers, "The Traditional Doctrine of Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), 165-86; W. Mathews

Grant, "Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 77 (2003), 129-44. Recent analytic treatments of the problem typically abandon the Thomistic version of simplicity in favor of some scaled-down version, e.g., Jeffrey E. Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford, 2009), 105-28.

<sup>32</sup> Fr. Levy goes on to seem to say more decisively that God's creative will is not contingent after all: "Why on earth should an action which originates in an intelligent being's nature not be free? . . . The necessity which stems from our nature is free, because it is the object of our uncoerced will." The definition of freedom as the unimpeded exercise of one's nature is Stoic in origin and is applied to God (i.e., both the One and Intellect) by Plotinus in *Enneads* VI.8. I do not think that it is correct, but even if it is, it is certainly not that of Aquinas, who emphatically asserts that God could do otherwise than He does (e.g., *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.81; cf. extensive references in the article by Redlon cited above, n. 31). This is also the view of the Greek Fathers, as I argue in my article cited above, n. 18.

<sup>33</sup> The footnote accompanying the passage quoted cites two texts from the *Triads*, but neither of them asserts divinization by created grace, and I am at a loss to see how Fr. Levy thinks they are relevant to the point at issue. See also similar reservations about Fr. Levy's book, *Le créé et l'incrété*, expressed in the review by Andrew Louth, *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 103 (2008), 967-76.